

CONSTRUCTION NEARS COMPLETION ON WIND FARM

By Dorothy Stieg

According to MDU spokesman Mark Hanson, construction of their Diamond Willow wind farm east of Baker nears completion. As of Jan. 11, 12 of 13 towers were up and one of them started producing electricity Dec. 29. Projections are all 13 turbines will be operating by the end of the month, weather permitting, Hanson said.

The 13 turbines will have the capacity of 19 1/2 megawatts which is enough energy to power 7,000 residences. That's all the construction MDU plans on the wind farm at the present time. However, when MDU officials met with the Fallon County Commissioners last spring, they indicated they planned to eventually produce 30 megawatts of electricity at the Diamond Willow. Hanson said that's a definite possibility in the future.

MDU built a substation about ten miles southeast of Baker to handle the electricity the 13 turbines will produce. This part of the \$38 million project was on line by Dec. 19.

Wanzek Construction, Inc. of Fargo, ND is the general contractor on the wind farm project which is located on leased private and county land. The contractor was on site in early September, foundation work began in late October and most of the tower equipment was on site in early December.

When a tower is complete, it stands 262 feet high and cranes are used in the actual construction. A larger crane than a standard construction crane is used to put up the lower and middle tower sections. An even larger crane is used to put on the top section, equipment housing and blades which are 121 feet long.

The blades will begin to turn with wind of six or seven mph, Hanson said. As soon as they are turning at a consistent rate, they start producing energy which goes into the power grid. The blades reach capacity at wind speeds of about 25 mph.

Montana law requires providers to have five percent of energy delivered to meters this year come from renewable sources. The requirement increases to ten percent by 2010 and 15 percent by 2015. "This wind farm meets the requirement for MDU through 2010," Hanson said.

MDU will have two full-time technicians working at the wind farm once it is completed. Hanson said workers access the top of a tower by climbing a ladder on the inside.

Some Baker residents were surprised they can see some of the towers in Baker.